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With Haig's departure, US foreign policy may take 'a lurch to the right'

Commentary

By Admiral Stansfield Turner

Having served in NATO as one of General Haig's three immediate operational commanders for 18 months, I do not believe that he could have resigned as secretary of state because he lost one or two battles, such as President Reagan's recent decision to further oppose the construction of a gas pipeline from the Soviet Union to Europe. As a general, he knows that you can lose several battles and still win the war. Beyond that, Al Haig has proved himself to be the ultimate survivor. After all, he is the only major figure from the Nixon White House who has subsequently served in top government posts.

Haig's departure, I believe, could only come because he was persuaded that American foreign policy was hopelessly out of his control. That means that it is now in the control of the conservative California clique with which the President is most comfortable. We should stand by for a lurch to the right in our foreign policy.

Whether that turns out to be the case or not, the belief that America is turning further right will largely undo whatever Mr. Reagan accomplished on his recent trip to Europe. On that trip he attempted to persuade our European allies that he and his administration had more depth in foreign affairs than just sabre-rattling and anti-Soviet rhetoric. Now the Europeans must assume that when he arrived home he gave in both to his own instincts and to the pressures of his closest advisers. The Europeans must now anticipate more reversals of position like that on the gas pipeline.

The prospects for progress in the arms control talks with the Soviet Union that commence this week will also be damaged by the Haig resignation. To begin with, the Soviets

will recognize that they are dealing with an administration that is having difficulty in formulating its positions on foreign policy. They are likely to take advantage of that by stiffening their initial positions in the negotiations in the hope that they can sneak something by us as we stumble around. They are also likely to expect a stiffer negotiating position from the US now that the right wing is in stronger ascendancy. That can only make them take more hard-line positions themselves lest they be outmaneuvered.

Of the three effects of the Haig resignation, that with respect to NATO will be the most serious. Our foreign policy may not lurch as far the right as some fear, but the new secretary will certainly be under pressures to let it do so. The outlook for any agreement with the Soviets on arms control is not very favorable in any event, and all such previous agreements have taken years to negotiate. The impact on NATO could be quite serious, however.

Our relations with our European allies have been drifting downward for perhaps a dozen years. Rectifying the situation is going to require give and take on both sides. This, in turn, requires mutual confidence. The prospects for confidence in Reagan and in the US have been set back immeasurably by the unfortunate way in which we have lost the services of a fine soldier-statesman.

George P. Shultz has a fine reputation and a good rapport with the Europeans on which to build. He also has powerful leverage within the administration, for it cannot afford to let internal bickering bring down a second secretary of state in the course of one presidential term. Let us hope that he uses these to full advantage.

Admiral Turner was director of the Central Intelligence Agency during the Carter administration.